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# Magritte and Cultural Capital: The Surreal World of Anthony Browne

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Middle-class order is only disorder. Disorder to the point of a paroxysm, deprived of all contact with the world of necessity.

The profiteers of capitalist disorder defend it by a stack of sophisms and lies whose credit they attempt to maintain in all realms of human activity.

Thus they do not hesitate to affirm that the bourgeois social order has permitted an extraordinary cultural development and that art, among other things, has conquered unexplored regions until then apparently inaccessible to the mind.

Doubt is no longer possible. We must denounce this imposture. (Magritte, “Bourgeois” 156)

I like the idea of trying to make “Art,” with a capital A, more accessible to children. I believe we undervalue the visual as a society. Too often I see children’s education mean that they grow out of pictures—away from picture books into words—as though that’s part of the development of a child’s education; the development of a child into an adult. . . . I want children to realize that fine art doesn’t have to be serious and heavy or even part of the educational process. We can just lose ourselves and see ourselves in a painting that was painted 500 years ago. (Anthony Browne, TeachingBooks.net 6)

Anthony Browne is firmly established in the canon of contemporary children’s literature: he routinely wins international awards for literary and artistic merit in the field, his works enjoy commercial success, and he is often used by children’s literature critics as either object of enquiry or illustrative example. The elements of Browne’s picture books most often mentioned by critics are gender and “the intertextual play by which he draws on a rich repertoire of texts, discourses, narratives and symbols” (Bradford 79). While the investigation of gendered discourses in children’s literature is crucial for the political project that is ideological criticism, my

focus in this article is artistic intertextualities and the circulation of cultural capital, which I see as central to Browne's work. Doonan acknowledges that Browne's "picture-book texts require his audience to have knowledge of other texts and discourses—folk and fairy tales, classics, and his own works; fine art, cinema, comics, advertisements—the intertextual process is his whole business" ("Drawing" 30). Given such intertextual content, it is worth enquiring just who the audience for Browne's use of "fine art" might be, given that "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 2), and, further, why Browne might make the intertextual process his "whole business." Browne's cultural work within his picture books "concern[s] the *distribution* of cultural capital, of which canonical works constitute one form . . . [and] that the distribution of cultural capital . . . reproduces the structure of social relations, a structure of complex and ramifying inequality" (Guillory 6). Thus, this paper considers the circulation and use of cultural capital within Browne's picture books, which evolves from intertextual referencing of canonical art toward an explicit account of the "value" of such art, and in doing so directs readers toward "recognition of artistic legitimacy" (see Bourdieu *Field*, 164).

Much of Browne's work both represents and participates in the "economy of cultural goods" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 1). However, the sheer number of Browne's books means that I must be selective, so I take as a case in point Browne's citation of Surrealist aesthetics and the works of René Magritte as visually recognizable deployments of canonical culture. That said, this paper both is and is not about Surrealism, Magritte, Surrealism and/or Magritte in children's literature, Surrealism and/or Magritte in the picture books of Anthony Browne. It is about Surrealism only insofar as I am asserting that Browne's citations of Magritte are not Surrealist but are Art as capital. The many complications and ambivalences encapsulated by such a claim are replicated and multiplied when attempting to define Surrealism, Magritte as (or not as) Surrealist artist, and in turn the relationships between Magrittian Surrealism, children's literature as a genre, and Anthony Browne as practitioner of said genre. Nonetheless, the first part of this article considers the possibilities made available by viewing Browne as a producer of Surrealist-citational children's literature before moving to consider more fully the potential ideological ramifications of such strategies. Although any citation of Surrealism necessarily calls up its politics, Browne's ideology of art, its production, and consumption, is not Surrealist but bourgeois and capitalist (in a Bourdieuan sense).

As this article is focused on the politics of Browne's Surrealist citation rather than those of Surrealism in and of itself, I hope to be forgiven the

brevity of the following account thereof. Any account of Surrealism as a coherent movement must acknowledge Guillaume Apollinaire's coining of the term *surréalisme*, in 1917, to describe a project "governed by two principles: surprise and analogical parallels, corresponding to the traditional opposition between form and content" (Bohn 126). However, it was in André Breton's manifestos (1924 on), that Surrealism (as opposed to Apollinaire's surrealism) found a somewhat coherent definition as both:

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. . . . [and] belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. (26)

Although Breton stays primarily within the realm of the verbal and the literary in his first manifesto, history demonstrates that the plastic arts were to be as important to Surrealism as the language arts in producing images.<sup>1</sup> Less concerned with form than affect, Bohn argues that the Surreal image "must have an analogical component. . . . To be effective the analogy must remain undetected on the surface but must trigger a response at a deeper level" (147). Even more specifically, Bohn argues: "Breton's remarks leave no room for doubt: to qualify as Surrealist an image must contain a concealed analogical link. In the absence of such a link, an image may not bear the Surrealist label, even though it may stem from Surrealist activity" (150). This kind of analogical representation characterizes Magritte's work, and becomes the focus of his epistemological revisions of previously known objects; in comparison, I argue that Browne's citations spring from Surrealist activity but are not in themselves Surrealist insofar as rather than engaging in Magrittian epistemological activity they are objects of a visual register.

René Magritte appears, with the benefit of hindsight, as a central figure of Surrealism. In his own lifetime, however, Magritte had a vexed—Gablik calls it "sporadic" (65)—relationship with Surrealism as a kind of problematic club. In the late 1920s Magritte moved from Brussels to Paris and formed personal and artistic connections with, among others, André Breton. While the discourse of Surrealism was (and always would be) productive for Magritte, the interpersonal aspects of the movement were not:

At that time the Surrealists under Breton were fanatical activists, and many of them were politically involved on the extreme left. Moreover, they were continually subject to a constant inner ferment which impelled them to issue violent denunciations and condemnations of each other. Magritte himself avoided all political affiliations, with the exception of a short-lived and nominal membership in the Belgian Communist Party in 1945. (Gablik 43)

Magritte returned to Belgium in 1930 after the collapse of the gallery that had been supporting him and an altercation with Breton. Despite the move, Magritte took with him a strong understanding of and commitment to Surrealism, and despite a disavowal of party politics retained a politicized sensibility that complemented his aesthetic sensibility:

Magritte, like Althusser, wanted to intervene in the world, through the meanings his works constructed, toward particular social changes. These included not only a transformed (“liberated”) human consciousness of the mutually overdetermining flux of thoughts and realities but also a transformed structure of economic, political, and cultural institutions and possibilities: socialism. . . . (Wolff 34)

Magritte’s Surrealism, then, is as much a political as an aesthetic project, a point I emphasize to establish a point of comparison with Browne’s deployment of Magritte’s works. Magritte may have challenged the appellation of Surrealist applied to him, may have made detailed rejections of the principles of Surrealism (see Ottinger 15), but both the content and reception of Magritte’s work—not to mention the ways in which his paintings consistently fulfill Breton’s requirements for the Surreal image—mark him as Surrealist.

Magritte’s works are recognizable for a number of visual tropes (see Clair; Dubnick), but of interest here are the ways in which Magritte’s Socialist politics underpin a visual epistemology of the Surreal, for as Short points out, “Magritte’s work can be read as a sustained meditation on ways of seeing—a never-exhausted problematization of vision” (103). In fact, I will suggest below that Browne deploys Magritte as object within a visual ontology of Surrealism that seems to call up, but actually works in opposition to, Magritte’s own epistemological goals. This in turn is in keeping with certain popular appropriations of Magritte’s works:

The marketing of Magritte has unquestionably been most extravagant in marketing itself—that is, in advertising. . . . Deftly sheering Magritte’s enterprise of its subversive intent, the admen have latched for all they are worth onto the power of his imagery to entertain while provoking, to pose intriguing puzzles and to linger in the mind when other brand images fade away. (Short 106)

In a sense, this also describes Browne’s deployment of Magritte, but Browne is “marketing” cultural capital. In circulating Magritte as a collection of visual referents, Browne *seems* to be producing a Surrealist visual epistemology, but is actually offering up Surrealism as something to be consumed.

In and of itself, Browne’s aptness at incorporating Magrittian citations into his picture books is remarkable. Given the purview of Surrealism’s

commitment to dreams, madness, and childhood, not as conditions to be permanently sought but to be accessed or replicated temporarily, Surrealist images would not seem to cohere readily with children's literature as a genre. A useful point of comparison is Michael Garland's picture book, *Dinner at Magritte's* (1995), which tells the story of Pierre—a young boy whose neighbors happen to be René and Georgette Magritte. Pierre is invited to dinner at the Magritte's house, where the dinner party is rounded out by Salvador Dali. *Dinner at Magritte's* unsurprisingly offers the reader a number of visual citations of, and strategies drawn from, Magritte's paintings (and a couple of Dali's paintings); the clear lesson offered to the child is that, despite possibly having parents who are still, quiet, boring, or nonintellectual, one can enter an exciting, creative relationship with the world through consumption of Magritte. The final page of the book offers brief biographical statements about Magritte, Dali, and Garland, after informing the reader that, "Surrealist paintings, often called Magic Realism, combine elements that usually don't belong together" (Garland). In comparison with such heavy-handed didacticism, Browne would seem to have achieved a consistent output of high-quality, aesthetically and diegetically pleasurable picture books that often include citations of Magritte, but do not necessarily explicitly explain to readers why they should pay attention to such citations. Browne's visual allusions to Magritte began in his first picture book *Through the Magic Mirror* (1976), which tells the story of a bored child who travels through a mirror to an alternate world. The Surrealist flourishes of the other realm are in keeping with the book's obvious thematic and titular homage to that favorite of the Surrealists, Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.<sup>2</sup> Browne makes direct visual references to the accoutrements of the bowler-hatted men found in several of Magritte's works including *Golconda* (1953) and *Decalcomania* (1966); one of the illustrations reproduces Magritte's well-known treatments of the *mise-en-abyme* effect combining easels bearing paintings with the environments such paintings are notionally reproducing, as in *The Human Condition* (1934) or *Euclidean Walks* (1955).<sup>3</sup>

*Through the Magic Mirror* proved to be the first in a line of citational picture books by Browne: a bowler-hatted man appears again in both *Look What I've Got* (1980), where Browne shows him walking in the background of a park scene, and *Zoo* (1992), where he is observed at the back of a crowd scene shown from a zoo animal's perspective. In *The Big Baby: A Little Joke* (1993) an immature father's attempts at masculinity are indexed by objects appearing on shelves behind him as he plays pool; each of these objects (e.g., a dart board, a racing car, golf clubs, a computer) works to metonymically represent his gestures of refusing the responsibilities, while

enjoying the privileges, of adult masculinity. Among these many objects is a reproduction of Magritte's not-pipe, from perhaps his best-known work, *This Is Not a Pipe* (1928–29, also known as *The Treachery of Images*), an intertextual reference that if pursued, might indicate an attempt on Browne's part to destabilize the communicative integrity of his own images, or even invite readers to consciously consider the word/image interrelationships, which characterize picture books as a genre. Certainly, these books show Browne's evolution from deploying Magritte references as background and foreground *mise-en-scène* in both fantastic and realist narratives, to using Magritte as a visual index of a protagonist's interior state. As Doonan notes: "Browne began to employ fantastic images as visual metaphors for varying and recognizable states of mind: happiness, a vivid imagination, jealousy, despair. Colour and perspective also play increasingly important roles in symbolic communication" (Doonan, "Realism" 11). Such strategies are perhaps most obviously deployed in *Changes* (1990), whose protagonist, the overtly intertextually named Joseph Kaye, must come to terms with the addition of a baby sister to his family. The reader is told: "That morning his father had gone to fetch Joseph's mother. / Before leaving, he'd said that things were going to change" (Browne *Changes*); the primary marker of change for Joseph is his seeing Surreal images in place of his familiar surroundings. Presumably just as the addition of a younger sibling to Joseph's family will change his experience of the world—make him see it in a new way—so too do appearances of Surrealist flourishes in Browne's depiction of his world make the reader see the world in a new way, and thus promote identification with and understanding of Joseph as a protagonist. Once Joseph's parents arrive home again and introduce him to his baby sister however, the images return to a realist register perhaps implying in turn that surreal perspective is a temporary anxiety response.

Browne's use of Magritte as an index of interiority is concretized in *The Tunnel* (1989), a book in which a young girl, Rose, travels to a fantasy-space with (or possibly for) her brother. Rose's readerly competence in fairy tales enables her to survive a dark forest and rescue her brother, who has (or has been) turned to stone. At this point, Browne refers to art as intertext insofar as the image of the petrified brother refers to Magritte's *The Song of the Violet* (1951), one of a series of stone paintings Magritte produced in the early 1950s. Calvocoressi notes: "The most terrifying of all Magritte's visions was of a world of utter silence in which humans and objects have turned to stone, as in some Absurdist play" (n. 45), and here Browne takes up this kind of terror. The frozen boy could represent Rose's feelings of alienation from her brother or the boy's own feelings

of social isolation: both readings are made available by the book's early openings. Rose saves her brother with an emotional outpouring:

She threw her arms around the cold hard form, and wept.  
Very slowly, the figure began to change colour, becoming softer and warmer. (Browne, *Tunnel*).

The children return home having forged a new, close relationship. It may be stretching the point to claim that Rose succeeds because she embraces Art, but her openness to doing so is significant. The narrative function of the Magritte-like statuary here is central to the page, and central to the story, but the fact that it refers to Magritte specifically is essential to neither. That Rose may not recognize a Magritte reference does not diminish the communication of Magritte to the reader, nor does the possibility that the reader may not recognize the reference diminish the power of the story. What is made available to those readers who *do* recognize the citation, however, is a fuller reading of the book as a whole. This is, to borrow a phrase from a quotation appearing earlier in this paper, "the whole business" of intertextuality, or so it would seem in Wilkie-Stibbs's description of the challenges and possibilities opened up for producers and decoders of intertextualities:

Literature for children has to tread a careful path between a need to be sufficiently overreferential in its intertextual gap-filling so as not to lose its readers, and the need to leave enough intertextual space and to be sufficiently challenging to allow readers free intertextual interplay. It is on the one hand formally conservative, yet it is charged with the awesome responsibility of initiating young readers into the dominant literary, linguistic and cultural codes of the home culture. (176–77)

Even more than in his earlier picture books, Browne's careful balancing of Magrittian citation with narrative coherence within *The Tunnel* would seem to perform this kind of productive induction into cultural knowledge. For those children who independently, or guided by adults, learn about Magritte's paintings, a rich, intertextual reading experience will be available to them, and for those who do not, the picture books still offer valuable opportunities to experience stories of childhood agency. At minimum, child readers are being introduced to a range of picture books, which take them seriously as viewers/readers: the sophistication of word and image interplay in Browne's picture books assume a reader able or willing to engage in multiple, simultaneous ways of reading. Although Browne's Magritte references do not have to be "recognised" in order to gain narrative understanding from the text, they nonetheless function as an attempt to introduce children to Surrealist art, and of course, to link Browne's work with that of Magritte.



Generally speaking, when critics take up picture books that feature citations of canonical art, these citations tend to be subsumed into an overarching discourse of cultural value which assumes that the contemplation or consumption of art is an end in itself. When specifically interpreting Browne's quotation of fine art critics seem to take Browne at his word—that he is “making Art with a capital A accessible to children”—and thus respond to his works within a broader cultural logic of childhood acculturation as itself inherently valuable; the politics of canon-making in childhood cultural development are rarely addressed or contested. For example, Bradford is almost alone in interrogating the politics of Browne's artistic intertextualities in her discussion of Browne's use of Magritte, Hopper, Munch (89); Dali (91); and Fuseli (92–93), but even she does not question the logic of Browne referring to such canonical painters in texts for children. Beckett mobilizes a similar, measured approach when she notes “the potential for elitism in parody, a danger that is even greater when children are the target audience” (175), even as she goes on to assert that the “remarkable success of Browne's picture books is largely due to their ability to appeal to readers at opposite poles of sophistication” (181). Beckett raises the fascinating proposition that sophisticated picture books such as Browne's, with their parodic play with classical art, may be “one of the book's survival techniques for the electronic age” (193); but this does not necessarily help us take account of Browne's specific uses of art, as visual citation has been a part of his repertoire since a pre-digital time. Bradford and Beckett do at least mobilize a critical gaze, offering self-reflexive responses that are productive in comparison with those accounts of picture books, which assume that knowledge of art is an essential experience for “all” children. An example of unquestioning celebration of Browne's references to classical art may be found in a claim made by Valteau, here concluding a broad discussion of Browne and others:

The inclusion of these classical pieces of art can open many different doors of interpretation. Also, by examining picturebooks in this manner, not only does this form of children's literature become more important, but also the quality of the books becomes required to be of better value. . . . it is important to celebrate this type of children's literature and to show artistically how important they are to the realm of art. (n.p.)

One unconsciously shaping force behind such readings might be the arguable corollary between the fact that Surrealism seeks, at least in some sense, to revisit childhood but is aware that it can never “be” childhood, and the inherent gap between adult mediator and child audience of children's literature. The adult distribution network for the genre participates in a communal fantasy about what it is or means to be child-like, and

projects this fantasy onto real children, just as Browne privileges “Art with a capital A” and projects it for and onto children. This is usefully (and consciously) demonstrated by Sipe in an article about the potential use of picture books in teaching Art History to young people. Given the pedagogical context of and for Sipe’s piece, it would be misleading to suggest that he is addressing Browne exclusively and unfair to question his focus on education; nonetheless, the conclusion of the article clearly performs a range of assumptions about adult mediation of “culture” for and on behalf of children (the same ideas that characterize Browne’s citational strategies):

Art is a way of seeing, a way of knowing and a way of feeling. The first step towards a more just and equitable society is to imagine what it would be like. . . . Talking about famous works of art through exposure to them (or parodies of them) in picturebooks thus invites an open stance, free of the inhibitions that frequently surround our response to art. . . . To encourage playfulness in relation to great works of art prepares the way for teaching children to be free in critiquing it, exploring the ways in which art reflects and inscribes not only the positive aspects of a culture, but also the negative, unjust, and limiting aspects of that culture. (209)

I do not necessarily disagree with Sipe’s general claims here, but I do want to suggest that the assumptions about adult-child relations on which they rest are the same as those that underpin Browne’s picture books as a tool of targeted acculturation. Sipe is offering a productive mode of criticism in that he envisions a utility for the consumption of art: the child may become an adult who directs a critical gaze at his or her own culture. Such a suggestion would seem to coincide with Magritte’s own project of challenging normative gazes. The reason I cannot wholeheartedly affirm Sipe’s position is my firm belief that Browne’s citations of Surrealism produce a visual ontological surreal different from Magritte’s visual epistemological surreal: Browne invites his readers to see new things where Magritte invited his viewers to see in new ways; Browne establishes a template for consuming approved culture, which appropriates and revises Magritte’s agenda of socio-cultural critique.

This is retrospectively unsurprising given Browne’s conflation of childhood and Surrealism as a visual epistemology: “I believe children see through surrealist eyes: they are seeing the world for the first time. When they see an everyday object for the first time, it can be exciting and mysterious and new” (TeachingBooks.net 5). Taken individually or cumulatively, the picture books already mentioned would seem to affirm Browne’s claims: to be productively inducting child readers into a cultural logic of Art that for Browne is positive, and which coheres with an always-already surrealist childhood gaze. However, one need have only a passing

acquaintance with the Surrealist movement to register Browne's claim about "children see[ing] through surrealist eyes" as a misrepresentation of Surrealism. Children need not have a surrealist perspective when "the absence of any known restrictions allows him the perspective of several lives lived at once" (Breton 3). The new may be mysterious and exciting to children, as Browne suggests, but this very mystery and excitement suggest that Surrealism is both unnecessary and unattainable in childhood. Suggesting that Surrealism is coincident with childhood also works to erase the political aims of the Surrealist movement: one of the goals of "seeing in a new way" (as opposed to Browne's "seeing new things") is to initiate an experience that will lead to a new political vision. Indeed, Breton argued that the "mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood" (39). If childhood is a state of being called up by Surrealism, it has no need, in and of itself, to be described as Surreal: "It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's 'real life'; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his *laissez-passer*, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself" (Breton 40). In short, why should children need the surreal, when in Breton's view, they have access to the real? In an account of Breton's own childhood, Rosemont asserts that "bourgeois civilisation remains a succession of monstrous crimes against childhood" (9), and thus locates one of the agendas of Surrealism: the bourgeois (as perjorative) childhood experience is the target of retrospectively remaking or revisioning for Surrealism, whereas for Browne Surrealism *is* bourgeois (as positive) childhood.

Browne's bourgeois appropriation of Magritte is only problematic, of course, if one is sympathetic to Magritte's own politics prior to the appropriation of his work or its recognition. Thus, my critique is—as much as those critics who applaud Browne's citations as productive childhood consumption of fine art—dependent on a symbolic logic of art and its function. Bourdieu argues that "aesthetic confusions about the legitimate vision of the world—in the last resort, about what deserves to be represented and the right way to represent it—are political conflicts (appearing in their most euphemized form) for the power to impose the dominant definition of reality, and social reality in particular" (*Field* 101–02). Thus, while I acknowledge my own complicity in such a conflict, I suggest that the circularity of my discussion to this point cannot ever really be resolved: on the one hand there is Magritte's Surrealism as Socialist, epistemological, and recovery of (but not in itself) childhood, on the other is Browne's Surrealist citation as bourgeois, ontological, and (claiming to be) childhood itself.

Each of these mutually reinforcing claims is predicated on my own Socialist politics, hence I experience an instinctual alignment with Magritte and an instinctual resistance to Browne (and all this without any actual children being involved!). Rather than pit my vision of art's function against those of other critics, using as evidence Browne's history of Magrittian citation, I am turning now to consider the "end" of Browne's Magrittian citation and a picture book in which Browne explicitly attributes a value to artistic consumption: a plate from *Willy the Dreamer* (1997) and the 2003 picture book, *The Shape Game*. These two important examples not only explicitly signal to the child reader that they are consuming Art, but also destabilize any sense of Browne's citations of Art being an end in itself.

Parallel to shifts in Browne's representations of "Art with a capital A," I also move beyond the specifics of Surrealism toward a reading informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theorizations of multiple modes of capital. Within a Bourdieuan model, cultural capital can be understood as the symbolic value of possession and exchange accrued by individuals who possess or have access to, certain culturally privileged modes of knowing and being. Bourdieu described it as "a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success . . . to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes" ("Forms" 243). I emphasize this origin for the concept as it identifies childhood as a time or place where the foundations for social status and success are laid, and thus coheres with critical assumptions about picture books as a tool for socialization and acculturation, but it offers a position from which to critique specific strategies of acculturation. Bourdieu elaborated on multiple occasions that the *crucial* "moment" for the initiation of cultural capital is early childhood, remarking that it "always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition" ("Forms" 245), adding elsewhere that:

Total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life and extended by a scholastic learning which presupposes and completes it, differs from belated, methodical learning not so much in the depth and durability of its effects . . . as in the modality of the relationship to language and culture which it simultaneously tends to inculcate. (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 66)

Therefore, learned/inculcated dispositions and tastes are rendered natural and normative within a framework of cultural capital, and are linked inextricably with a classified vision of society. Bourdieu argued that "art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences" (*Distinction* 7). In Anthony Browne's picture books, art and culture work to shape child

readers' understandings of agency and authority. Browne generally privileges subjects who consume legitimate culture, and specifically identifies the production of legitimate culture as a marker of social value. If "one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 66), it may be possible to determine Browne's cultural politics without yoking such a reading to one aesthetic/political movement, such as Surrealism. Instead, and given the intersection points between early childhood and the establishment of cultural capital as marker of distinction and status, children's literature (specifically the genre of the picture book) offers a legible/material site in which we might see the "cultured household," or "pre-scholastic" operation of cultural capital.

In books such as *Through the Magic Mirror* and *The Tunnel*, Browne's visual references to Surrealist paintings offered the possibility of readerly recognition and acculturation, but did not necessarily depend on such recognition in order for the texts to function. In *Willy the Dreamer* (1997) and *The Shape Game* (2003), Browne participates in a more specific mode of signaling that Art is present by visually situating the citations within a studio and a museum. Beckett notes of such strategies:

If the setting is a museum or an art gallery, children are likely to sense that the illustration incorporates artistic echoes of the past and that the reader is being called upon to make an "inferential walk" outside the text, even if they do not have the competence to recognize the art works and decode the parody. (191)

In each of these books, as with earlier examples, the specific recognition of individual citations is not *necessary* to enjoyment or understanding of the book (although, as an authorized account of Tate Britain's holdings, *The Shape Game* provides such information), nonetheless child readers are likely to be viewing the images *as* Art, even if they do not recognize each individual citation.

*Willy the Dreamer* is a text that takes childhood creativity and imagination seriously, as over the course of the book readers see on every page a new vision that Willy is creating of and for himself, including a number of popular culture roles: as film star, singer, wrestler, etc. Apart from the obvious thematic focus on the privileges and possibility of imagination, there is also a visual focus on Magrittian references throughout the book. In terms of consuming Art, the page that reads "Sometimes Willy dreams that he's a painter" enacts a culmination of Browne's Magrittian references. The picture shows Willy working on a painting and surrounded by paintings he has presumably already completed. The center of the plate

shows Willy painting a version of the *Venus de Milo*, but in such a way that calls up Magritte's *Attempting the Impossible* (1928). On the wall behind Willy are six paintings, which moving counter-clockwise from the bottom-left of the plate, appropriate Magritte's *The Son of Man* (1964) for which Browne replaces Magritte's apple with a banana; *This Is Not a Pipe* (1928–1929) and *Not to Be Reproduced* (1937), both of which appear with only minor alterations from Magritte's originals; *The Golden Legend* (1958) where bananas are substituted for Magritte's loaves of bread; *The Postcard* (1960); and, *The Philosopher's Lamp* (1936). The visual changes that theoretically render these paintings as parodic are all consistent with Browne's use of bananas and chimps throughout his works, particularly in those books where Willy appears. This plate is thus a complicated intersection of multiple cultural traditions, including those of Browne himself. In order to contemplate what the page offers child readers, even at a basic level, one has to imagine multiple forms of knowingness, or competence, in the codes produced.

I would like to consider some (but not all) of the possible reader positions opened up by this page. For reasons of space, I must take for granted a child reader already familiar with the form and content of traditional picture books, who is versed in the complex relations of words and pictures that characterize the genre. I must also assume a reader relatively competent in normative Western culture, one who understands what a paintbrush, a palette, and a painting are. For a child reader who does not know Browne's books, Willy is situated as protagonist, is present throughout the book, and thus probably offers a safe point of identification; Willy is painting, and a visual thematic unity among the paintings suggests that he has made all of them. Clearly then, assumptions about an individual painter's body of work are mobilized, and will offer an entry point into the book as a whole. For the reader who has encountered other Browne books, Willy may be familiar as a stand-in for the author (a model that Browne promotes, as will be discussed below), possibly encouraging a biographical reading of the book that will deepen the individualist logic of childhood imagination leading to adulthood creativity. Even in the absence of such biographical information, Willy will be a unifying presence across multiple picture books. For the Magritte-savvy reader (even one who does not know Browne's works) the page is characterized by a number of explicit Magrittian citations. Such a reader may be gratified by the linking of "artist" and "Magritte" as implicit synonyms, but may also be mystified by the choice of citations. For the Browne-savvy and Magritte-savvy reader, the page may exemplify a self-referential staging of Browne's oeuvre: Browne might be suggesting, with self-deprecating

humor, that he can only parody Magritte, reproduce rather than produce great Art; or, the page might enact a kind of apotheosis of Browne's self-canonization as an inheritor of, and participant in, the tradition of Art. In any case, the reader is invited to share a knowing gaze. That these are only a handful of the possible reading positions made available by one page is of course a testament to Browne's skills as a picture-book author and artist. At the same time, they inscribe (if I have not misrepresented nor misread them) an implicit hierarchy of knowing and being: the more levels of reader competency present, the more complex the meanings will be, or, the reader will be more and more empowered to generate multiple meanings, which is a position of privilege in Browne's books generally and is a theme of *Willy the Dreamer*.

If it seems contrary to my earlier statement about moving away from Magritte to have spent such time focusing on a Magritte-heavy page, it seems appropriate to note that just as this page is my final Magritte-moment, so too is it Browne's. The plate just discussed—"Sometimes Willy dreams that he's a painter"—mobilized the Magritte Estate into action against Browne. In a 2000 interview, Browne told *The Guardian*:

"I've recently been sued by the Magritte estate for my fake reproductions of his work in Willy the Dreamer," he explains. "My French publisher got a letter demanding that all the books be taken off the shelves as well as a lot of compensation. I thought that I was encouraging children to look at Magritte's pictures, but I had to take out all references to him for the new edition." (Eccleshare)

It is problematic to treat a comment made within an interview as one would a polished written statement, but there are a number of ways in which Browne's rhetoric here seeks to construct the Magritte estate as somehow anti-child readers, and himself as the persecuted victim. It only takes a glance through Browne's unacknowledged appropriations of Magritte in his work generally, or *Willy the Dreamer* as a case in point, to determine that Browne's goals may be more than "encouraging children to look at Magritte's pictures," given that Magritte is never named within these texts. That is to say, the fact of Magritte being cited but not named introduces child readers to the art but not the artist. I cannot presume to know what distinctions Browne is implying between "fake reproductions" and "real reproductions," but it is certainly true that the revised edition of *Willy the Dreamer* looks quite different from the first edition. No less than six plates have been altered to remove or elide Magrittian references, most significantly the plate showing Willy as a painter, where despite retaining the central reference to Magritte's *Attempting the Impossible* all the paintings are now citations of works by Vincent Van Gogh. Moving again counter-



clockwise from the bottom-left corner of the plate, the six paintings now present versions of *Vincent's Chair with His Pipe* (1888), *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe* (1889), *Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers* (1888), *Vincent's Bedroom* (1888), *Old Man with His Head in His Hands (At Eternity's Gate)* (1890), and *Wheat Field under Threatening Skies with Crows* (1890) (Browne *Willy* [rev. ed.]). On the one hand, the shift is borne of legal necessity, on the other, the move from Surrealism to Impressionism (even as *Willy the Dreamer* remains scattered with Surrealist references) would seem to belie Browne's claims about children's seeing in a surreal way. If it is not specifically Magritte's Art that readers are introduced to, but Art as a category of meaning, what remains is a strategy of acculturation legible through the lens of cultural capital.

The actions of the Magritte estate not only throw the extent of Browne's Magrittian citations into relief, they also reveal that no artist—least of all Magritte himself—in life or in death can operate outside the market. The debate about originality and reproduction staged between Browne and the Magritte estate is as much a debate about economic capital as it is cultural capital. Browne mobilizes a defense of expanding the cultural capital of Magritte and his child readers, thereby “enriching” Magritte's properties, while the Magritte estate mobilizes a defense of protecting assets (literal and symbolic) and effectively accuses Browne of theft. Each party is using the language and logic of cultural capital and economic capital as intertwined. The replacement of Magritte with Van Gogh in the revised *Willy the Dreamer* does not resolve the tensions of competing capitals, it merely avoids it. The replacement still locates “Art with a capital A” as important to understanding *Willy the Dreamer*, but it also signals that “Art” trumps any one artist, excepting perhaps, Browne himself. What finally emerges as the begged question of Browne's picture books is not one about Surrealism or Magritte (although for 25 years Browne seemed to be focusing on Magritte's works more than those of any other artist), but rather: if Art is so important, *why* is it important?

Browne would seem to provide an answer in *The Shape Game*, which emphatically thematizes the consumption of identified Art, and in doing so, attributes a value to it. The absence of Surrealist Art from *The Shape Game* must—like the move from Magritte to Van Gogh in *Willy the Dreamer*—shift readerly understanding of the meaning and function of “Art with a capital A” in Browne's picture books. Indeed, what emerges from *The Shape Game* is an account of and for Art that would seem to shed retrospective light on Browne's earlier books: readers learn that Art is valuable insofar as it aids one in acquiring agency and imagination, or as reflection of the self. The solipsism inherent in the literature of early



childhood is linked with cultural capital as an inherently valuable aspect of selfhood, as is demonstrated in and by *The Shape Game*, a story of becoming an artist; indeed it would seem to be the story of Anthony Browne becoming “Anthony Browne.” The frontpapers open the book with a statement from Browne:

From June 2001 until March 2002 I worked as the writer-and-illustrator-in-residence at Tate Britain in London. This was part of a three-year project called Visual Paths, developed by the Tate in partnership with the Institute of Education. I worked with a thousand children from inner-city schools, teaching literacy using the resources within the gallery. My job was to create a new book based on responses to works of art in the Tate collections, and to conduct workshops with the children and their teachers. I remember it as a time that changed my life forever. (Browne *Shape*)

That the title page immediately following this statement shows a person being liberated from a cage should signal the book’s understanding of itself. Not only did the experience apparently change Browne’s life, but the story shows a family’s life being changed by a visit to the museum. The plot depicts the family from Browne’s *Zoo* (1992) visiting Tate Britain; the narrator is one of the (now grown-up) sons looking back at this visit as the event that set him on the path to becoming an artist. As readers watch the family walk to the museum, they see people disconnected from each other, walking at a distance from their family members past high-rise buildings in a brown landscape. The first view of the museum is from the perspective of the family, and makes the building loom large, imposing, and dull above them. The narrator tells us: “I felt a bit nervous and even George and Dad were quiet. (At first)” (Browne *Shape*). The family are shown coming together physically and communicatively as they examine several well-known Tate holdings. Their reception of the works includes an unpacking of the symbolism in Augustus Egg’s “Past and Present 1, No. 1” (1858), although it does not go so far as to mention the painting’s thematic concern with adultery; imagining themselves as participants in paintings; and figures from the paintings chasing them, as when a lion chases Dad. These strategies of shared interpretation and identification reunite them as a family unit: on the walk home the family now smiles and communicates and they walk past a changed cityscape that is now bathed in gold, the utilitarian buildings hidden by aesthetically pleasing façades. The reader has demonstrated for them a change in perception of the self and the world, one that would seem to be the result of visiting a museum, of proximity to canonical art.

In addition to this immediate benefit of family unity through consumption of Art, the boys also gain future benefit as they learn a new artistic game,

the shape game, which involves adding details to amorphous shapes until they become recognizable as referents (the game of Art itself). As the family leaves the museum, they pass through the inevitable gift shop and the narrator tells the reader, "It was time to go, and on the way out we called in at the gift shop. All we bought were these" (*Shape* [UK]); above the text is a picture of a sketchbook and markers. Intriguingly, the first U.S. edition of *The Shape Game* draws more explicit attention to competing forms of capital, as the narrator comments: "It was time to go, and on the way out we went to the gift shop. Everything was very expensive, so all we bought were these" (*Shape* [US]). In using these artistic tools, the child protagonist becomes the adult artist narrator, who attributes his present cultural production to his childhood exposure to art. Logically, child readers of *The Shape Game* are being offered such exposure even if they may not have the possibility of attending Tate Britain in person. *The Shape Game* thus thematizes the inculcation of cultural capital, demonstrates the extent to which "taste" is a cultural construction, and performs a bourgeois privileging of artistic production. Perhaps most importantly, *The Shape Game* sheds light on Browne's overarching cultural politics: the linking of his own work with that of a canonical cultural heritage (one not always focused on Surrealism) and the transmission of cultural capital to child readers so that they might recognize Browne's own potential canonicity. The "real" artist who creates the narrator artist is of course Browne.

There is an element of Poe's "Purloined Letter" about Browne's circulation of cultural capital that would seem to belie Bourdieu's descriptions of such capital's transmission as "concealment," "diffuse," "disguised," and "risky" ("Forms" 254). With respect to the thematization of "Art with a capital A," Browne's transmission of capital would seem to be comprehensively *visible* and *open*. Nonetheless, it is important that the works of art referenced in the picture books I have mentioned would seem to indicate that such Art is important/valuable/significant, but to not really articulate *why* beyond a general sense of personal development (in the best instance, toward becoming an artist). Arguably then, such capital is truly only available to those who have, or will later acquire, those learned dispositions/competences which legitimize and are legitimized by such value, and is thus explicitly linked with social status. Within a Bourdieuan model, Browne is alluding to restricted production within the field of general production: the child reader is interpellated as "mass" or "ordinary" consumer, with the potential to operate within bourgeois legitimacy; the "knowing" or adult reader is interpellated as bourgeois consumer who recognizes the legitimacy of autonomous art (see Guillory 331). In the ideal case, the reader will become an artist just like Browne himself; even

if not, Browne's withholding of certain aspects of reader competence means that those who do not pursue such knowledge or activity later in life will never fully participate in bourgeois legitimacy: the walls of the citadel will remain intact.

The trajectory from legitimate consumer to privileged but legitimate producer of Art, which can be mapped across Browne's picture books, and which is reified in *The Shape Game*, is very much the trajectory that Browne maps on to his own life. I have no interest here in pursuing the biographical criticism that attaches to reception of Browne's work; rather I am interested in the ways in which Browne links individual development to artistic production and consumption. The briefest of biographical accounts lend themselves to a teleology of cultural production and social status. Browne was born in 1946, in Sheffield, to parents who owned a pub. He attended the Leeds College of Art before working as a medical illustrator and greeting-card designer. His first picture book was published in 1976 by Julia MacRae books, and he has worked as a children's book creator ever since, sometimes illustrating other people's stories, mostly as author/illustrator of his own picture books. Browne was the writer and illustrator-in-residence for Tate Britain in London, 2001–02, and in 2005 received an Honorary Doctorate of Education from Kingston University, London (Kingston "Contents").

Browne's public persona and history emphasizes a narrative of personal development from Yorkshire working-class boy to producer of aesthetic culture. Tacitly, the communication of this history encourages biographical criticism of Browne's work. For example, his publisher Walker Books' website quotes Browne describing his father as "an unusual man—outwardly strong and confident, but also shy and sensitive—a bit like the gorillas I love to illustrate now" ("Anthony"). The site also tells the visitor that Browne "thinks the character, Willy, is based on his own childhood," a claim that might offer insight into *Willy the Dreamer*, and that "*The Tunnel* was inspired by a very frightening tunnel he and his brother used to go down when they were boys" ("Anthony"). This website's rhetoric of Browne's personal development as measured through the acquisition of cultural capital reflects the orthodox and frankly teleological account of Browne and his work. It also implicitly interpellates an ideal reader of Browne as one progressing through a similar teleology. It is unsurprising then, that this same page moves through headings, "As a child," "As an adult," and "As an artist," and does not fail to inform visitors that:

Anthony has won many prizes for his work, including the Kate Greenaway Medal (twice) and the Kurt Maschler Award (three times). In 2000, he received the highest international honour for illustration, the Hans Christian Andersen Award for his services to children's literature. ("Anthony")

Any number of profiles of Browne repeat or elaborate on the movement from the seventeen-year-old boy scarred by the sudden death of his father to publishing success story, but I am more interested in the ways that Browne has cultivated an extremely canny account of his early professional years. To give an example, Browne has stated:

medical art was great training; it was much better than actually being in art school, because I wasn't being judged on the quality of the paint or design or balanced composition—just on whether the artwork did the job. I had to explain something visually that was very difficult to explain any other way. (Marantz and Marantz 698)

This comment both demonstrates the formal-critical approaches to art learned at college, and disavows them in favor of practical *work*, or art as labor. In comparison his first publisher Julia MacRae recalls: “One day Michael Brown, our art editor, brought me a shy young artist who had a portfolio of surreal, hugely appealing pictures. His name was Anthony Browne” (217). The Leeds College of Art would therefore seem to deserve some credit for initiating Browne’s (surrealist) skills and career. In that he *seems* to occupy several or no class positions simultaneously (he both has and does not have cultural capital in excess; his appreciation for Art both is and is not the result of formal education; he both rewards and withholds reader competence in art), Anthony Browne represents an embodied form of cultural capital that both legitimizes and is legitimized by his work.<sup>4</sup> This embodied cultural capital was thematized in *Willy’s Pictures* (2000), a series of vignettes in which Willy produces parodies of a wide range of canonical art.<sup>5</sup> The cover of the book shows Willy painting a portrait of Browne, the final page shows that Willy has set down a mask and the figure walking away is Browne himself. It seems that coincident logics of artistic production and consumption both structure and are structured by Browne’s life and works as trajectories of increasing and multiple forms of cultural capital.

Not all the child readers of Browne’s picture books will have the privilege, luxury (or possibly even the desire) to acquire competencies in classical Art, but the possibility of Browne’s picture books becoming foundational in children’s development of cultural competence demands interrogation of those texts’ cultural politics. So I come to the ironies of my paper: just as my discussion both is and is not about Magritte, so is Browne’s logic of “Art with a capital A” about and not about Magritte; Browne’s Magrittian discourse and my Magrittian analysis came together at the moment that Magritte disappeared from Browne’s books, due (ironically enough) to intervention by the Magritte estate. In order to consider Browne’s shifting representations of Art, it seems necessary to map trajec-

tories across his works and artistic biography, which depends on the very teleology of the developing artist that is the object of my critique. In all likelihood, literary critics are much more likely to read Browne's body of works in order of their publication than children are, and are thus always already predisposed to a teleological interpretation, which is a vexed enterprise: in order to critique the use of, say, Magritte, one has to understand what such use might *mean*. Whether this entails an adult explaining to a child, or a critical conversation between adults, the adult/child binary is reinscribed at the same time as knowing/not-knowing reader, which means a transmission of culture has taken place, the operation of cultural capital is elaborated at the very moment one might seek to contest it.

Browne is able to participate in public discourses of artistic production and consumption because he is canonized, because he occupies a privileged position within contemporary picture-book culture. The logics of capital or privilege that enable such prominence reflect uncomfortably back to and on a critical community unable or perhaps unwilling to examine its own dependence on similar logics. If Browne's (in my opinion, problematic) goal of making Art accessible to children depends on developing definitions of Art, making determinations about which works of art will be rendered, and determinations about who should have access to art, and *why*, then it seems that reception and/or analysis of his works requires that readers do the same. I believe that we should take the challenge, that we should acknowledge that Browne's shape games are actually shaping games. However, to claim that Browne circulates, not so much "Art with a capital A" as grade-A cultural capital, may only be possible for those complicit (willingly or not) in the structuring logics of such capital. Guillory reminds us that "*the selection of texts is the selection of values*" (23, original emphasis), which means that even in mobilizing a critique, my selection of Browne's texts has, for better or worse, further disseminated Browne's values: I am dependent on and complicit in both "Art with a capital A" and cultural capital just as surely as Browne is.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Despite Breton's earlier involvement with Dada, and Dada's obvious influence on Surrealism, it is nonetheless important to differentiate Surrealism from a

broader concept of *avant-gardism*. Bohn states that “the Surrealists benefited both directly and indirectly from their avant-garde predecessors, who served as important models and influenced them in numerous ways” (1), but also notes that “Surrealism was born out of a certain disillusionment with Dada” (3). Most simply, that disillusionment dealt with Dada’s perceived negativity: “While Dada had intended to subvert the concept of artistic creativity, Surrealism had a more positive aim, seeking to fuse the conventional, logical view of reality with unconscious, dream experience in order to achieve a ‘super-reality’” (Masters).

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous references to Magritte throughout Browne’s illustrations for his 1988 version of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* that work more explicitly as a doubled reference in the sense that: “many of Magritte’s fellow surrealists were declared aficionados of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*” (Spitz 38). Whether, however, this means that “Magritte would have enjoyed knowing that his art inspired a set of surreal alternatives to the canonical nineteenth-century Sir John Tenniel illustrations drawn by a prominent contemporary children’s book author and artist, Anthony Browne” (Spitz 38) is debatable.

<sup>3</sup> Whenever possible I am providing specific examples from Magritte’s oeuvre but given the ways in which Magritte returned repeatedly throughout his career to certain images or motifs, such as bowler hats, mirrors, easels, eyes, windows, flames, and so on, I can only gesture toward such examples. I do not claim to have always offered a definitive intertextual source.

<sup>4</sup> A useful point of comparison is the discursive production of the artistic biography of J. K. Rowling, whose *economic* “Cinderella”/hardship narrative served a purpose early in her career, but has had to be dismantled as it starts to hinder rather than help Rowling in the face of phenomenal publishing success. It might seem insulting to her audience for Rowling to continue to claim a Cinderella position when she now literally owns a castle. In comparison, Browne’s developmental story of acquiring and then disavowing cultural capital continues to be politically and economically instrumental. Both are narratives of the self-made artist, but where Rowling’s is primarily one of economically-based social mobility (a form of social mobility that arguably poses no long-term threat to dominant social structures), Browne’s is one of culturally-based social mobility, which places him in a position of possibly shifting the cultural logics he has successfully manipulated. The unlikelihood of such a shift does not negate its possibility: Rowling may live in a castle, Browne possibly has the keys to the kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> *Willy’s Pictures* would seem to be an obvious point of interrogation for my paper. However, the book contains no references to Surrealist paintings, and includes a fold-out endpage that not only provides provenances for each painting parodied by Browne but also miniature visual reproductions. This is not only a clear strategy of acculturation and education for the implied child reader, but also this provides a space for a commentator (presumably Browne) to offer

an individual appraisal of each “original” painting and thus performs a kind of authoritative position in addition to that of parodist. The strategies of citation and self-canonization are so explicit in this book as to render a detailed account almost redundant: the book clearly and openly seeks to interpellate a child reader subordinate to Browne as cultural mediator even as they are acculturated towards the recognition of canonical art.

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